

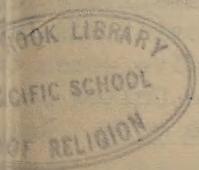
to promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which are here in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

# The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.

er 138

December, 1948



## A Country Woman Looks at the World

By Ruth Buxton Sayre\*

The question of war and peace is not a "man's problem" or a "woman's problem." Just as our basic social unit, the family, cannot prosper without the full partnership of husband and wife, it is equally true, I believe, that we can never hope to have a world-wide family of nations without the full partnership of men and women. It is our ability to work together that will determine whether or not we will move forward and be able to frame plans for reconstruction.

In Mary Beard's *WOMAN AS FORCE IN HISTORY*, the author points out that, contrary to much that has been written in history books (written by men), women actually have been an important force in shaping world events. It was a woman who discovered the peaceful art of agriculture, and persuaded her hunter to stop roaming around the to give up his killing. (Of course this was only a relatively good accomplishment since men still seem to be roaming around out-of-bounds and are still in the business of killing.)

It was the French women of the 19th century who contributed two new and revolutionary ideas to social thinking: (1) The idea of "civilization", meaning "to make civil"; that war is barbaric and must be outlawed, and (2) The idea that progress can be made in the art of living, through the promotion of the general welfare.

If we could stop right there all would be well. But Mary Beard is a truthful woman. She goes right on to say that, although women have done some good things in the world's history, they have also been involved pretty deeply in the business of war. Women as well as men have promoted wars, have started wars in order to gain their own selfish purposes, and have fought in wars side-by-side with men.

Certainly we know that recent history has been no exception to this charge. The fascist governments depended for their success largely on the

\* Mrs. Ruth Buxton Sayre is an Iowa farm woman and the President of the Associated Country Women of the World. Her article appeared in the May, 1948, issue of *THE WOMAN'S PRESS*, which is the national magazine for the Y.W.C.A. Used with the kind permission of Mrs. Sayre and of *THE WOMAN'S PRESS*.

approval of women. "The halo around the head of Mussolini was the gift of women as well as men." Women helped Hitler along every step of his way to absolute dictatorship.

What am I trying to prove by this, and what has it to do with a woman's view of the world situation? My point is simply this. If women are such a powerful force in shaping the world's future, either for good or evil, how are they going to use their influence now in this critical hour of the world's history?

This is no rhetorical question. We are up against the hard fact that, both in Europe and the United States, women now outnumber men. Tentative estimates in 1945 showed eight to ten million more women than men in Soviet Russia; three million more women than men in Great Britain; approximately five women to three men in Germany and about a million more women than men in the United States. The significance of these figures lies in the fact that these women vote. Women are no longer "just women"; they are voters.

We also have to take into account the fact that, since World War I, millions of women, including farm women, have been organized in all kinds of national and international groups. At a recent meeting of non-governmental organizations given consultative status "B" with the Economic and Social Council, women were there representing every kind of organized women's groups including the Women's International Democratic Federation, claiming 81 million Communist women members in Russia and other countries of the world.

In what direction are these groups moving in the field of world reconstruction? What are these women thinking? One thing is certain. Women believe that world recovery programs -- whatever they are -- must contribute to peace. To them peace is the issue.

Organized groups of women are tackling many of the social and economic problems of world recovery.

For example, the Associated Country Women of the World, the only international organization of rural women, prepared and adopted in 1941 (not in 1948) a memorandum on Reconstruction. This memorandum dealt with problems about which countrywomen everywhere, no matter where they live, are greatly concerned. For example, it recommends an immediate postwar program of feeding the starving countries of the world, a long-term program of freer trade in the world-wide distribution of food. It pledges help to refugees from all parts of the world, and says countrywomen will make children their special care. These rural women agreed on the need for better rural housing, better public services and more household conveniences. They advocated an extension of health and nutrition education, and were unanimously in favor of measures to give equality of educational opportunity to all children.

These are goals upon which most of us would agree. Our problem in world reconstruction lies, not so much in stating our aims as in agreeing upon the means of achieving them. What are the requirements for obtaining these goals? What will all of us have to do, in order to translate our ideas into realities?

My viewpoint of the world situation is that we need not only programs for recovery but people who are prepared and willing to act as world citizens.

of a small and wholly interdependent society.

The first requirement for world citizenship is the understanding that no sector of the world economy, whether it is agriculture, business, labor or women can solve its problems separately. Agriculture cannot exist in a vacuum. It must relate itself to consumption, to employment, to investment, to trade. Any other course is futile and unrealistic. That is the hard fact we must face in making present and future agricultural policy.

It will mean squaring our national agricultural policies with our international aim for freer world trade. One of the first things that strikes the visitor to Europe is the restriction on currency, travel and trade that hems in these small countries. Coming from a huge, relatively free-trade area, what one sees in Europe is almost impossible to believe. But it is easy to see what trade restrictions have done to the living of the people. We know how our own trade barriers contributed to national isolation and economic warfare in the period between wars. If agricultural policies are to be made with any reference to the world situation it will mean lowering tariffs on some farm products -- wool for example. It means that we will have to understand clearly that, if we sell to other nations, we will also have to buy.

I suppose it is the rankest heresy for a farmer's wife to say that -- especially the wife of a farmer who has wool to sell -- but if tariff concessions to freer trade had even the merest chance, and I think they have, to contribute to peaceful relations among the nations of the earth, then I am for them. In such a case, my stake is a world of peace and freedom for my children. It is not hard to see the issue there, if we have any intention of realizing our desire for world recovery and world peace.

The second requirement for taking an effective part in the making of international policy is acceptance of the responsibility of keeping ourselves informed about what is going on; particularly, we must learn the economic facts of life.

The "little woman" who can't even balance her own budget at the end of the month has a long way to go before she can understand national budgets and fiscal policies. But of one thing I am sure, she must study and she must know the economic factors which are shaping her world.

Acceptance of political responsibility is another "must" if we are to act realistically in the field of world citizenship. In Italy where women voted for the first time in 1945, one of the women elected to office was asked if she thought Italian women would really play a big part in politics. "Oh yes," she replied, "twenty-two years of fascism, war, the Nazi occupation, the clandestine struggle, the victory -- they have taught Italian women that politics is the health of your family, the food of your baby, the security of your house, the education for your children." And I would add -- the peace of the world.

Women are just beginning to learn this. They have never yet exerted their political power for the things they believe in. They have not shown much political gumption. In the past, women loving cleanliness have prided themselves on divorcing their activities from politics, which they customarily refer to as "dirty." This gives us a self-righteous and "holier-than-thou" feeling, but it does not bring about the legislative measures we want.

If we are to be realistic in politics we must study the records of our candidates and vote for them on the basis of those records. If we believe world trade is necessary to world peace, and our legislators have consistently voted against the reciprocal trade agreements, we ought not to waste any more time urging them to vote for these measures. Neither should we just vote against them in the next election. We ought, by all the rules of the game, to begin working in our local and state political organizations to get someone elected to office whose political philosophy will support the measures we believe will build a peaceful world. I have great faith in the power of prayer, but I also believe in the old adage that the "Lord helps those who help themselves." Women have prayed long and ardently for peace. The time has come for them to implement their prayers by specific, realistic, practical means of getting the job done.

No outline of the qualities needed in the job of world reconstruction would be complete if I did not mention the need to bring to this task the patience and the willingness to get along with other people. We are too impatient with the United Nations. Admittedly, it has fallen far short of our hopes. But it has accomplished some encouraging things. Its chief asset is that it is still functioning and that Russia is still a member.

It does not seem to me that we can expect to blow the world to pieces for eight years and put it back together in two or three. We must remember that only about 20 per cent of the people of the world have free governments. The other 80 per cent have as yet no tested institutions of self-government. To develop a world organization made up of free people will be a long, hard process. We must make up our minds that there will be conflict, but it must be kept to the conference table.

There is one requirement for world citizenship that does not have to wait on the solution of economic problems or on political processes — that is the willingness to actively promote better understanding among the people of the world. To see them not as "aliens" or "foreigners", but as human beings. Article I of the Draft of the International Declaration of Human Rights says, "All men are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed by nature with reason and conscience, and should act towards one another like brothers."

There are numberless people in the world today who not only believe that but are willing to act on it. Last week I received a letter from the secretary of the Dutch Country Women's Association. She said, "A group of Dutch women will pay a visit to Germany to see how some German women's organizations are starting their work. They will visit Westphalen, where there are already twenty two small groups of countrywomen. I think it is hardly necessary to tell you that we are gladly willing to lend the German women a helping hand. We feel that this form of information is the best one we can start with after the years of German occupation." This, from a group of women who suffered starvation, degradation, death and the prison camp under the heel of Nazi oppressors. So long as there are people like that in the world, I have faith to believe that the human race will survive and will work out its destiny.

The choices we have to make in these days are not easy. They are terrible and compelling. But our choice does not lie in the compulsion of the atom bomb. It lies in the souls of men and women -- in their moral and spiritual courage.





Twelve years ago, Franz Werfel was booted off a lecture stage in East Prussia when he told the student audience that their real problem lay in a choice, not between Right and Left, but between "Above and Below." He had to leave the hall under the protection of police because he had told his audience that nationalism is a politically ersatz religion! Today, most of these young students are dead Nazi soldiers; for them Franz Werfel was right. The choice for us, too, is not between Right or Left. It is between Above and Below. The choice is between good or evil, selfishness or unselfishness, nobility or littleness. The curse of our time is our tendency to disassociate economic and political issues from moral values. It is what goes on in people's minds -- and in their hearts that decides the fateful future.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The world is divided by fear. Let us calmly and in good faith analyze the elements of our fear and let us proclaim that there is no material difficulty or mental conflict between peoples that can be in reality solved by war.

There is no woman anywhere in the world who wants war, who does not know that the only guarantee for the happiness of her children and her home is that the peace of the world should be secured.

United therefore in the knowledge that war brings misery and ruin to peoples everywhere, let the voice of the women of the world ring out strong and clear to remind statesmen that their most urgent task is to work to remove the causes of war."

Appeal to Women of the World;  
Commission on Status of Women,  
USSR-Byelo Russia.

THE WOMAN'S PRESS  
May 1948

